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Deborah Ann Yard

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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"ESOTERIC SIPS": DICKINSON'S WINE AND LIQUOR IMAGERY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

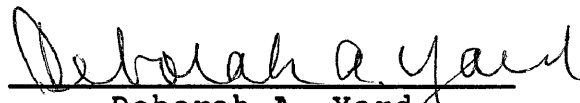
Deborah A. Yard

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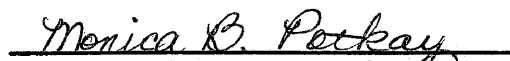
Master of Arts


Deborah A. Yard

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William F. Davis


Richard Lowry


Monica B. Potkay

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the way Emily Dickinson uses wine and liquor imagery in her poetry, for this imagery integrates many of her central poetic concerns with her exploration of the creative process itself.

The complexity of the wine and liquor metaphors is most clearly shown in the themes of distillation and intoxication which run through her work. Dickinson often uses the theme of distillation when discussing the writing or making of poetry, and she relies on the metaphor of intoxication to describe the state of inspiration and heightened perception which is a necessary prerequisite of the creative process.

This study considers the implications of the wine and liquor imagery in relation to Dickinson's social context, her use of the mythological implications of the wine metaphor, and her use of this metaphor in relation to the central themes of renunciation and desire. Dickinson draws on all of these concerns in order to explore the image of wine beyond its obvious symbolic meaning in Christianity, ultimately appropriating it to serve her own poetic purposes.

"ESOTERIC SIPS": DICKINSON'S WINE AND LIQUOR IMAGERY

As even the most casual reader of Emily Dickinson knows, her poetry incorporates images of wine and liquor. Such widely-anthologized poems as "I taste a liquor never brewed" and "Success is counted sweetest" (214, 67)¹ make distinct references to such imagery. Although this imagery has been given passing acknowledgement by critics, its full implications have not received the attention and analysis warranted by its complexity and pervasiveness. Indeed, these references comprise a recurring motif in which Dickinson's central poetic concerns are integrated with her exploration of the creative process itself.

In fact, when the subject of a poem is the mind or work of the poet, more likely than not, Dickinson will employ liquor imagery. For example, in an obscure poem which begins with a solitary stroll "Through those old Grounds of memory" (1753), Dickinson describes the experience as "a divine intemperance / A prudent man would shun. / Of liquors that are vended / 'Tis easy to beware / But statutes do not meddle / With the internal bar." It is this "internal bar," presumably filled with an endless supply of intoxicating spirits which no one else but she can tap, which Dickinson repeatedly returns to in the poems, and this inner source of intoxication is continually set up against the work of other,

published poets ("liquors that are vended") and society's expectations ("statutes" which meddle).

In these lines, as is typical of the liquor poems, many of Dickinson's central concerns come together in a complex network of signification which incorporates such diverse elements as the religious, social, economic and creative. As in many liquor poems, in Poem 1753 she establishes a number of dichotomies: "intemperance" and temperance, "divine" laws and human "statutes," published poetry and private poetry, conformity and freedom, and societal mores and individual choice. These tensions are at the crux of her poetic explorations.

The above example demonstrates how liquor imagery merges with other complex themes, and how it is a means by which Dickinson is able to consider them. Poem 1753 illustrates Dickinson's interest in intoxication, an important theme in her work because she uses it figuratively to describe the state of heightened perception and inspiration a poet needs to experience before making poetry. Dickinson ties intoxication with the imagination and with creativity, and in the liquor poems in general, she suggests that having an intoxicated mind is the first of two steps in the process of making poetry. The second step involves the actual composing of a poem, associated with a theme of distillation which runs through Dickinson's work. As expressed in the liquor poems, Dickinson writes about not only the effects of liquor, the states of

intoxication, inebriation and drunkenness, states similar to the stimulation of the poet's mind, but also about liquor's production, its distillation and its brewing, for these activities are analogous to the work of the poet. Through this thematic duality of intoxication and distillation, Dickinson uses the wine and liquor poems to contemplate both the experience behind the making of poetry and the making of poetry itself.

An understanding of all the implications of Dickinson's wine and liquor imagery hinges on an awareness of the many ways Dickinson uses that imagery. First and foremost, one must understand the social context in which these poems were composed, for this imagery is derived directly from Dickinson's experience as a nineteenth-century woman in a privileged social class. Her comparing of distillation to writing especially comes from this experience. Secondly, in order to appreciate how Dickinson uses intoxication imagery to explore the highs and lows of the human experience, one needs to be mindful of the mythological implications of wine imagery, for such an awareness enhances an understanding of the intoxication theme. Thirdly, in understanding the wine and liquor poems, it is essential to realize the significance of this imagery in terms of Dickinson's exploration of renunciation and desire. And lastly, an awareness of these crucial aspects of the wine image will lead to a deeper appreciation of the way Dickinson uses wine imagery to go

beyond the obvious symbolic import of wine in Christianity, often relying on the pagan overtones in the Christian wine symbol, showing it not only as an archetypal image of suffering and sacrifice, but also one of transcendence and immortality, all critical components in Dickinson's conception of poetry.

Accordingly, Dickinson makes references to some form of drinking in many of her most important poems.² As Vivian R. Pollak has noted, even though the poems using images of food and drink make up only slightly more than ten percent of Dickinson's poems, "because these poems are among her best, incorporating as they do the basic tensions of her experience, the qualitative impression exceeds numerical weight" (108).³ In addition to the quality of the liquor poems, also the complexity and sophistication of the wine and liquor imagery justify a thorough analysis of Dickinson's use of this imagery and its implications.

I

The degree to which the symbols of wine, liquor and nectar pervaded Dickinson's thinking is reflected in an often mentioned anecdote about her eccentricity. It relates an episode in which the poet offered what critics have called the "odd" or "unlikely" choice of a glass of wine or a rose to one of her visitors (Leyda 2: 115-16).⁴ The story appeals to

readers of Dickinson not merely because it relates a peculiar anecdote about the poet, but also because we have an unconscious sense that it speaks to some truth about her poetry.

The offering of the choice of wine, source of intoxication, or a rose, source of nectar and essential oil, is an appropriate one from a writer who believes that the true poet "Distills amazing sense / From ordinary Meanings-- / And Attar so immense / From the familiar species / That perished by the Door --" (448). Perhaps Dickinson showed her genius most clearly in her ability to transform ordinary things into extraordinary symbols, as she did with wine and flowers in her poetry.⁵

The importance of Dickinson's imagery of wine and flowers can best be understood by first understanding their implications in the life of this poet and in the lives of nineteenth-century women of Dickinson's class. Wine and flowers were offerings Dickinson herself created, cultivated and nurtured. She prepared them over time with patience, love and pride. They were gifts of the self. We know she made her own wine (L 49, L 100), grew her own grapes (L 53), and gave wine as a present to friends (L 205). We also know of her love of gardening. She grew many types of flowers in her garden and in her conservatory, and her extensive knowledge of botany is evident in the poems (Patterson 107). Emily Dickinson baked the family's bread, as her father liked hers

best; in fact, she won a prize for her rye and Indian bread at the local cattle show (Sewall, *Life* 1: 87, 2: 468; Pollak 109). Of course, the most important gift she shared is her poetry.

One of the main ways Emily Dickinson uses liquor metaphors is in describing the making of poetry. She suggests that the process of making poetry is like the process of making alcohol, attar, honey, wine, and the like, and also that these processes are analogous to women's work. This distillation theme in Dickinson's poetry has economic implications as well, and therefore it must be examined in light of its link with not only home economics in Victorian America, but also the broader system of economics outside the home.

The literal act of distillation was not only women's work, but also a womanly art, in the Victorian American household. Distillation involves the painstaking process of breaking up something complex into relatively pure, individual components, ultimately condensing those components. This is a particularly appropriate description of Dickinson's making of poetry. Dickinson's poems are the epitome of dense, compact and distilled language. Furthermore, in light of the womanly association of distillation, Dickinson's distillation metaphor validates the composition of poetry as women's work.⁶

Dickinson's gifts of wine, food, flowers and poetry are truly gifts of the self because they are products of her

labor. Coming from the "women's sphere" as they do, they have a special meaning as gifts and, for Dickinson, as images in the poetry. Not only were making wine, baking bread, growing fruit and flowers, and making attar all women's work in the Victorian American household,⁷ so were bearing children, nursing the sick, and keeping watch over the dying (Wolff 50). Of course, another domestic duty was the marriage debt, "The Daily Own--of Love," for which Dickinson uses the language of economic exchange, "Sweet Debt of Life--Each Night to owe--" (580) (Shurr, *Marriage* 82-83). The products of women's labor were not always easy to appraise beyond how well they contributed to the comfort and happiness of the breadwinner of the family. In general, women's domestic duties involved organic processes that require time to grow, rise, ferment, develop--in short, the products of women's work were the result of nurturing, as were the products of Emily Dickinson's work, her poems.

Many of Dickinson's poems about distillation and organic processes of creation contain revealing insights into the poet's attitude about her poetic contribution and about the status of women and issues of gender. She writes:

Least Bee that brew--
 A Honey's Weight
 The Summer multiply--
 Content Her smallest fraction help
 The Amber Quantity-- (676)

The poem works on several levels. Literally, it describes the integral role played by a single bee in the making of honey.

The poet asserts that the work of even the smallest or most lowly of bees is a significant contribution. The pronoun "Her" calls for another reading, for it seems to apply not only to the female honeybee, called a worker bee, but this "Least Bee" who brews represents the predicament of woman, who works without recognition from and power in the outside world, but who knows her sphere of influence is important for mankind. A variant of the second line, "A Honey's Worth," further reinforces this reading. A third reading is appropriate, also, in that this "Least Bee" seems to be the poet, who knows her abilities and merits. This confidence suggests a hint of feigned modesty in Dickinson's claim of being such an unlikely poet. In a broader sense, the poem expresses doubts about the accepted notions of who does and does not make a vital contribution as a member of society and as a poet.

Pressures to accept their subordinant lot and to conform to society's ideas of ideal womanhood were clearly exerted on women during the nineteenth-century, both in America and in England. In *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*, Elaine Showalter describes the sexual division of labor advocated by psychiatrists which reflects the Victorian belief, reinforced by Charles Darwin in *The Descent of Man*, that "natural" differences existed in the mental powers of the sexes (Showalter 122). "Woman's work was clearly motherhood," notes Showalter, "which fulfilled and

exercised her nature as it also served the needs of society and the race." Women's work as mothers and nurses of children, "even if it might be seen as less noble than man's work as father of ideas," had to be taken seriously. Showalter continues,

Mental breakdown, then, would come when women defied their 'nature,' attempted to compete with men instead of serving them, or sought alternatives or even additions to their maternal functions. . . .

It is clear to a twentieth-century reader that these theories were convenient ramifications of existing social relations between the sexes (123).

The disturbing notion that a woman's refusal to comply with society's expectations of her life's role might lead to a mental breakdown sheds some light on just how narrowly women's roles were defined. For a nineteenth-century woman, the cost of a life of intellect was high. Although Showalter is discussing the mindset of Victorian England, her description of gender roles applies to Victorian America as well.

Other Victorian writers were more sympathetic than Darwin to women and their roles in society and in the family. One American who wrote on women's issues was the editor Dickinson sought out to critique her poetry in 1862. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who became a lifelong friend of Dickinson, made this observation about his society in an *Atlantic Monthly* piece in 1859:

As matters now stand among us, there is no aristocracy but of sex: all men are born patrician, all women are legally plebeian; all men are equal in having political power, and all women in having none. This is a paradox so evident, and such an anomaly in human progress, that it cannot last forever. . . . (Wolff 252)

Higginson's candid comment provides a revealing glimpse into Dickinson's social milieu. A similar observation about the domestic realm during Dickinson's lifetime was made by Friedrich Engels in 1884. Engels, however, goes a step further than Higginson in using the mercantile language which was becoming so important and ubiquitous in the late nineteenth century:⁹

The modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman; and modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules. Today, in the great majority of cases the man has to be the earner, the bread-winner of the family, at least among the propertied classes, and this gives him a dominating position which requires no special legal privileges. In the family, he is the bourgeois; the wife represents the proletariat. . . . the peculiar character of man's domination over woman in the modern family, and the necessity, as well as the manner, of establishing real social equality between the two, will be brought out into full relief only when both are completely equal before the law (744).

Considering the entrenchment of gender roles during the nineteenth century, it is not unreasonable to say that in the Dickinson household, her father was the breadwinner, she the bread-baker; and the language of capitalism does not seem out of place. Nineteenth-century women were citizens with no income, no vote, and no voice, so it is not surprising that so many of Dickinson's poems dealing with home economics -- food, drink, flowers, attar -- employ the language of capitalist economics.

Among the critics who address Dickinson's use of economic

language is Joan Burbick, who in "Emily Dickinson and the Economics of Desire," says that "Dickinson describes longing in terms of poverty and wealth, loss and gain, producing poems that both mimic and deprecate the mercantile vision of her social class" (175). A similar statement may be made about Dickinson's use of drinking imagery. Liquor and nectar are often associated with the economics of capitalism. One of Dickinson's speakers says,

I took one Draught of Life--
I'll tell you what I paid--
Precisely an existence--
The market price, they said.

They weighed me, Dust by Dust--
They balanced Film with Film,
Then handed me my Being's worth--
A single Dram of Heaven! (1725)

Of course, she may be using the word "Draught" here in the sense of a withdrawal from some cosmic bank account, but her pairing of "Draught" with "Dram" seems more to imply drinks of liquor, metaphors for heightened and ecstatic experience. As is typical of Dickinson's reliance on multiple word meanings to add levels of meaning to her poems, the speaker's "Draught of Life" may also be a draft of a poem.

One way Dickinson would have been able to prevail over her second-class citizenship was by pursuing a higher status through the writing of poetry. In "The Poet," Ralph Waldo Emerson writes of a "new nobility" which comes along with being a poet. He says,

O poet! a new nobility is conferred in groves
and pastures, and not in castles or by the sword-

blade any longer. . . . Thou shalt leave the world,
 and know the muse only. . . . God wills also that
 thou abdicate a manifold and duplex life, and that
 thou be content that others speak for thee. . . .
 The world is full of renunciations and
 apprenticeships, and this is thine; thou must pass
 for a fool and a churl for a long season (340).

Not only did being a poet presumably bring with it a special status, but Dickinson also suggests that as a poet, she finds great benefits in abdicating "a manifold and duplex life," for she is more receptive to the sustenance of important thinkers. Her speaker in Poem 711 feels empowered as a poet because of her special appreciation of other true poets:

Strong Draughts of Their Refreshing Minds
 To drink--enables Mine
 Through Desert or the Wilderness
 As bore it Sealed Wine--

To go elastic--Or as One
 The Camel's trait--attained--
 How powerful the Stimulus
 Of an Hermetic Mind--

The speaker's mind is like "Sealed Wine," growing richer and more mellow as time passes. The speaker finds sustenance in the ideas and writings of those "Refreshing Minds" she admires, and because of their inspiration, she describes her mind as having attained "The Camel's trait" of self-sufficiency. She is like the ruminant camel, which is able to store and carry its sustenance in its hump, allowing it to overcome even the most difficult environmental conditions.¹⁰ The speaker asserts that there is strength in having "an

Hermetic Mind," a mind insulated against or resistant to unwanted outside influences. Moreover, Dickinson may have been playing on the word "hermitic," having to do with someone who lives a solitary existence. Like Emerson, who in the passage above advocates that the poet "leave the world, and know the muse only," Dickinson saw the necessity of just such an existence to create poetry.

Furthermore, Dickinson asserts that the poet's urge to create is a powerful, impelling force. This desire is likened to a bee's drive to produce honey in one of the variants of Poem 1526, where a bee looks back over his life and recalls past success and failure:

His oriental heresies
Exhilarate the bee
And filling all the Earth and Sky
With gay apostasy

Fatigued at last a clover low
Ensnares his jaded eye,
Sweet homestead where the butterfly
Betakes himself to die.

Intoxicated with the peace
Surpassing revelry,
He spends the evening of his days
In blissful revelry,

Recounting nectars he has known
And attars that have failed,
And honeys, if his life be spared,
He hungers to attain. (v. 1526)

The bee enjoys a "blissful revelry" of the mind while "Intoxicated with the peace." Not only does this bee fondly remember "nectars he has known" and try to put into perspective the "attars that have failed," most importantly he

fantasizes about "honeys" that he "hungers to attain." Dickinson ends the poem on this note, with the bee dreaming about honeys that might be. The poet, too, feels driven to produce his or her own sweet honey, poetry. Like the bee, the poet shares the experience of hungering to produce, to create. Like the honey, the poem is the product of labor, love and art. The hunger to create, Dickinson says, never ends.

II

The poet, like the bee who dreams of honeys he "hungers" to create, feels compelled to produce, to write. First, however, the poet must have an intoxicated mind, just as does the bee of Poem 1526. Emily Dickinson writes of this state of intoxication almost as a gift and of the poet as one who is chosen.

The intoxicated mind is stimulated, as if in a state of drunkenness. This state is connected to experience--experience of the imagination, of poetic inspiration, and of a sensual, spiritual, emotional or intellectual nature. Intoxication, however, has a dark side which involves a loss of control and a surrender to the irrational, to chaos and possibly to madness.

Dickinson's interest in exploring and recording the emotional realms of the human mind, from the heights of ecstatic joy to the depths of deep depression, darkness and

irrationality, manifests itself in her use of intoxication imagery. For example, she writes of liquor both as a source of exhilaration, enabling one speaker to lean against the sun (214), and as source of destruction, which may lead an unrestrained bee to die "'of Nectar'--" (230).

Still, at the heart of the exploration of the dual nature of wine lies the dangerous prospect of crossing the fine line between wine as a source of exhilaration, ecstasy and immortality, and wine as bearer of destruction, irrationality and madness. So, too, the same beautiful and sweet-smelling rose which is the source of nectar often entices the bee to indulge in excess, and Dickinson's poetry is full of encounters between various types of flowers and drunken and reveling bees (214, 230, 128).¹¹

Most importantly, Dickinson suggests that intoxication is necessary for the creation of poetry. She uses the imagery of wine in particular to represent the capacity of the imagination to explore and transcend realms which ordinary language cannot satisfactorily describe. In one of her most famous poems, in which Dickinson likens an exploration of the imagination to intoxication, she writes,

I taste a liquor never brewed--
From Tankards scooped in Pearl--
Not all the Frankfort Berries
Yield such an Alcohol!

Inebriate of Air--am I--
And Debauchee of Dew--
Reeling--thro endless summer days--

From inns of Molten Blue--

When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee
 Out of the Foxglove's door--
 When Butterflies--renounce their "drams"--
 I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats--
 And Saints--to windows run--
 To see the little Tippler
 From Manzanilla come! (214)

The speaker here experiences an intoxication of the senses, but it is an intoxication in the mind. The "liquor" she tastes was "never" brewed, and it cannot be brewed, for it is a liquor of the imagination. Emerson compares poetic inspiration to intoxication in "The Poet," and Dickinson's Poem 214 may have been influenced by parts of that essay. Emerson writes:

The poet knows that he speaks adequately then only when he speaks somewhat wildly, or 'with the flower of the mind'; not with the intellect used as an organ, but with the intellect released from all service and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life, or as the ancients were wont to express themselves, not with intellect alone but with the intellect inebriated by nectar. . . .

This is the reason that bards love wine, mead, narcotics, coffee, tea, opium, the fumes of sandalwood and tobacco, or whatever other procurers of animal exhilaration. . . (332)

Emerson's reference to the poetic imagination as "the intellect inebriated by nectar" and "the flower of the mind" suggests the extent to which wine, nectar and flower are interconnected in poetic discourse.

Poetic vision or inspiration is another kind of intoxication, however, not of the senses, but of the "pure and

simple soul." Emerson suggests that to some extent, an element of denial is required for poetic inspiration. In "The Poet," he asserts that many artists, "all but the few who received the true nectar," chose to lead a life "of pleasure and indulgence," missing out on the true inspiration:

The spirit of the world, the great calm presence of the Creator, comes not forth to the sorceries of opium or of wine. The sublime vision comes to the pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste body (333).

Emerson's prescriptions for a poetic life undoubtedly caught the attention of Emily Dickinson. As Albert Gelpi points out, she had a great deal of respect for Emerson, who was "an inspiration and model--perhaps the inspiration and model--for Dickinson when she was choosing to be a poet" (Muse 223).

In a number of poems, Dickinson explores the exhilarating side of the intoxicated mind. For example, in Poem 1101 Dickinson represents life as a personal, boundless journey. This poem idealizes the intoxicated mind, setting it apart from the conformity and boredom, and especially the lack of spirituality and imagination, which most people experience. The fortunate person whose mind is intoxicated seems to be set apart from the rest; he or she indeed has a chance to receive the "sublime vision" which Emerson finds so necessary for creating poetry.

Between the form of Life and Life
The difference is as big
As Liquor at the Lip between
And Liquor in the Jug
The latter--excellent to keep--
But for ecstatic need

The corkless is superior--
I know for I have tried (1101)

The poem asserts that most people know merely "the form of Life" rather than "Life." The form of life is like a liquor jug, already shaped and set by society. Life, however, is like liquor about to be tasted, a source of intoxication which may bring unknown surprises, both pleasure and sorrow. The speaker states that she has tried the shaped, restricted and controlled "form" of life, but she prefers the freedom of the "corkless" state. Furthermore, she chooses intoxication, the joy of the present, over the sober postponement of joy until some other time. Here liquor becomes a rich symbol of transcendence and freedom in her poetry, a way to escape the narrow perspective of the patriarchal society around her.

In Poem 838, Dickinson shows her interest in exploring realms of potentiality. The unknowable, the unarticulable, the impossible--these are the realms of the poet.

Impossibility, like Wine
Exhilarates the Man
Who tastes it; Possibility
Is flavorless--Combine

A Chance's faintest Tincture
And in the former Dram
Enchantment makes ingredient
As certainly as Doom-- (838)

Dickinson subverts the usual connotations of "Impossibility" and "Possibility." For most people, possibilities seem preferable to impossibilities. For the poet, the person who "tastes" wine, the opposite is true. "Impossibility" exhilarates the poet as wine does; "Possibility / Is

flavorless." But in the "former Dram," the wine of impossibility, Dickinson says that "Enchantment" and "Doom" are both ingredients, both necessary parts of it. Not surprisingly, Dickinson again identifies the discrepancy between the disappointment, despair and grief of human existence and the hopeful, transcendent power of the imagination as the appropriate subject for poetry.

In Poem 383, "Exhilaration--is within--," Dickinson refers to a state of euphoria which seems to be "royally" bestowed. The intoxication of this exhilaration surpasses that of wine because it affects the heart, mind and soul.

Exhilaration--is within--
There can no Outer Wine
So royally intoxicate
As that diviner Brand

The Soul achieves--Herself--
To drink--or set away
For Visitors--Or Sacrament--
'Tis not of Holiday

To stimulate a Man
Who hath the Ample Rhine
Within his Closet--Best you can
Exhale in offering. (383)

Perhaps Dickinson is weighing the advantages of not publishing her poetry. Dickinson wrote this poem about 1862, the year she first reached out to Higginson. The second stanza explores the poet's realization that such a state of joy can only come from the self. Self-affirmation is far better than the opinions of other people, the "Visitors" of the poem. The wine, in a sense, is sacramental in its ability to connect her to a higher, spiritual realm. The third stanza considers the

person who has "the Ample Rhine," or who feels a joyousness in his heart because he knows his own soul or is confident in his own abilities. Such a person does not need the intoxication of wine because he has, perhaps, the "sublime vision" which Emerson discusses in "The Poet."

This reliance on the self and on one's own opinions is a significant theme in Dickinson's work. She seems to feel that repressiveness by society is an undesirable force which breeds unthinking conformity, but that limits imposed by the self bring strength and power. In poems such as "Mine--by the Right of the White Election!" (528) and "The Soul selects her own Society--" (303), Dickinson celebrates the power to make choices for oneself, "To drink--or set away" (383).

Dickinson intimates that intoxication may have to do with the experience of losing one's balance in the process of searching for and ultimately attaining a new sense of self. The speaker of Poem 252, enveloped in the depths of grief in the beginning of the poem, begins to experience a state of drunkenness after just the "least push of Joy," attributing this intoxication to "the New Liquor."

I can wade Grief--
 Whole Pools of it--
 I'm used to that--
 But the least push of Joy
 Breaks up my feet--
 And I tip--drunken--
 Let no Pebble--smile--
 'Twas the New Liquor--
 That was all!

Power is only Pain--
 Stranded, thro' Discipline,

Till Weights--will hang--
 Give Balm--to Giants--
 And they'll wilt, like Men--
 Give Himmeleh--
 They'll Carry--Him!

At first, the speaker is so consumed by grief that she compares it to a "pool" of liquid she tries to wade through. Because it is familiar, she does not try to escape it. Just the "least push of joy" causes her to tip as she wades. As she totters on the pebbles under her feet, she requests that "no Pebble" smile at her because she tips with drunkenness from this "New Liquor." The speaker attempts to play down the power of this intoxication which is making her lose her balance by saying, "'Twas the New Liquor / That was all!" This drunkenness is different than that experienced in "I taste a liquor never brewed--," for the speaker implies that she is somehow uncomfortable with being tipsy in this manner, but she has no control over it. She suggests that she felt more comfortable with the sorrow because she was "used to that," she could take some control over it, but this is not the case with joy. She is not accustomed to it and perhaps is not sure if she deserves it. Because of the intoxication that the "New Liquor" causes her to experience, then, Dickinson's speaker must become acclimated to a new way of moving through life.

In another poem, Dickinson describes the reverse of what happens in Poem 252. In Poem 430, "It would never be Common--more--I said--," the speaker recalls a happy time in life

which came to an abrupt end, when "suddenly" a "Goblin" drank her "Dew." In *Emily Dickinson's Imagery*, Rebecca Patterson notes that this dew "appears . . . to be related to all the nectars and dews and assorted liquors that represent ecstasy in her poetry. . . ." (160) Dickinson often implies that the loss of such dew or liquor is part of the risk of intoxication, and the pain that comes with such a loss is the inevitable price.

Nowhere is the risk of intoxication more apparent than it is in classical mythology. The image of nectar, which Dickinson associates with both wine and flower, denotes the drink of the gods in classical mythology; in fact, this nectar was believed to impart immortality. Moreover, wine played a crucial role in the myth of Dionysus. Dickinson most certainly was aware of the mythological implications of wine, not only from her wide reading, but more specifically from the copy of Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable* which her father had purchased for the family library in 1856.¹²

Recalling the myth of Dionysus contributes to a deeper understanding of Dickinson's wine imagery. The myth, with its association with the irrational, ties it to many of the themes which pervade her work. The god of wine is associated with mysteries, ecstasy, madness, rebirth and immortal life, all complex and frightening subjects for a poet on a spiritual quest for transcendence. Most importantly, the Dionysian themes which many of Dickinson's wine poems evoke connect this

poet with the whole history of literature, going back to the Greek tragedies and comedies performed in honor of the god of wine. In her exploration of many of those themes central to the myth, Dickinson draws on the religious origins of art and touches on the primordial urge to explore and understand the mysteries of human existence.

In Greek mythology, Dionysus is the god of wine and ecstasy who often drove people mad. In Roman mythology, he is called Bacchus or Liber. Dionysus, a giver of joy and soother of cares, was experienced by his worshippers through intoxication or through ecstasy, which was generally felt as intensified mental power and the surrender of everyday identity (Howatson 192-3). He is associated with the Bacchic mysteries, which included promises about the afterlife and also a liberation and surrender to Bacchic frenzy in return for a sense of freedom and well-being (Howatson 377).

The worshippers of Dionysus were usually female, and these women, called bacchanals or maenads, went into the wilderness to worship him. They experienced not only freedom and ecstatic joy, but also the mad frenzy which caused them to take part in a wild, bloody practice of tearing apart wild animals and devouring the flesh. Like wine itself, the god of the vine had a double nature, sometimes bringing joy and sometimes tragedy (Hamilton 56-57).

The myth of Dionysus has an artistic element as well. In ancient Greece, dramatic performances took place during the

festivals held in the god's honor. As Edith Hamilton explains,

The greatest poetry in Greece, and among the greatest in the world, was written for Dionysus. The poets who wrote the plays, the actors and singers who took part in them, were all regarded as servants of the god. The performances were sacred; the spectators, too, along with the writers and the performers, were engaged in an act of worship. Dionysus himself was supposed to be present. . . . (61)

In ancient Greece, Dionysus became the center of the belief in immortality. The god of the vine was not only a reveler and inspirer, but also a sufferer. He died with the approaching cold weather, but he was always brought back to life. The worshippers of Dionysus believed that his death and resurrection illustrated that the soul lives on forever after the body dies. According to Hamilton, it was his joyful resurrection that was celebrated in his theater (61-62).

Emerson's poem "Bacchus," as many critics have pointed out, may have prompted Dickinson's thematic response of "I taste a liquor never brewed" (214).¹³ His poem may have kindled Dickinson's interest in the myth and its poetic implications. For example, Emerson's poem exclaims:

Bring me wine, but wine which never grew
In the belly of the grape,
.
I thank the joyful juice
For all I know;-- (95-96)

Dickinson alludes to the myth in several poems. Of course, the "little Tippler / Leaning against the--Sun," in a variant of the final line of Poem 214, is a memorable image, one which

Albert Gelpi describes as "a witty depiction of herself as a ladylike Dionysian reveler" (Muse 288).

But the figure of the bacchanal was a problematical one for the Victorian society of Dickinson's time. If the poetic imagination can be likened to "the intellect inebriated by nectar," then a creative, passionate woman such as Dickinson is indeed intoxicated. She may even be said to be mad.¹⁴ Therefore, she runs the risk of becoming the most dangerous type of woman, like the bacchanals of the myth. The image of the passionate, intoxicated, libidinous woman in the myth is precisely the woman Victorian society feared and felt most compelled to restrain. In Victorian America as well as Victorian England, passionate, intelligent women, especially unmarried women, were treated with suspicion or worse (Burbick 174-75).

Dickinson hints at her anxiety about publishing in a letter dated June 7, 1862, in which she uses rum imagery to signify a sense of happiness, as she does in several other poems (1628, 872). This third letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the editor and writer whom she treated as a mentor of sorts, is revealing not only because it refers to intoxication, but also in that it suggests a fear of being judged unstable by those who do not understand or appreciate her work. The letter, a response to Higginson's second letter in which he apparently paid her a compliment, begins, "Your letter gave no Drunkenness, because I tasted Rum before--

Domingo comes but once--yet I have had few pleasures so deep as your opinion, and if I tried to thank you, my tears would block my tongue--" (L 265). We can infer how crucial the publishing question is to her at this time, even though she tries to sound cavalier:

I smile when you suggest that I delay "to publish"
--that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to
Fin--

If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her--
if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the
chase--and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me
--then--My Barefoot-Rank is better--

You think my gait "spasmodic"--I am in danger
--Sir--

You think me "uncontrolled"--I have no Tribunal.
(L 265)

The prospect of publication was the impetus which had caused her to write to Higginson in the first place, and his response seems to have startled her. The ambivalence she must have been feeling about her desire for recognition as a poet along with her reluctance to open herself to public scrutiny seems to linger in the background of many of her liquor poems.¹⁵

As Elaine Showalter describes the "managing" of women's minds in Victorian England, some doctors went to the most extreme lengths to restrain certain unacceptable behavior in women. One doctor performed surgery to remove women's sexual organs in the hope of curing female insanity. Showalter's description of this doctor's work in his London clinic between 1859 and 1866 is worth quoting because it reveals some of the unacceptable behaviors of women considered mad enough to justify such mutilation. Of Dr. Isaac Baker Brown, Showalter

writes:

In the 1860s, he went beyond clitoridectomy to the removal of the labia. As he became more confident, he operated on patients as young as ten, on idiots, epileptics, paralytics, even on women with eye problems. He operated five times on women whose madness consisted of their wish to take advantage of the new Divorce Act of 1857, and found in each case that his patient returned humbly to her husband. In no case, Brown claimed, was he so certain of a cure as in nymphomania, for he had never seen a recurrence of the disease after surgery (75-76).¹⁶

That Victorian society saw women's resistance, passion or independence as more shocking than the treatments some doctors advocated to correct these behaviors, and that it saw women's intellectual stimulation leading to mental breakdown or the loss of reproductive capacity would lead any intelligent woman on either side of the Atlantic, especially one with eye problems, to fear a diagnosis of madness herself. The pervasiveness of such attitudes could have prompted Dickinson to avoid publication so as not to risk exposure of her thoughts and genius.

While it is difficult to gauge Dickinson's awareness of the treatment of patients in mental hospitals, she probably had some knowledge of the conditions of American institutions by virtue of her father's appointment in 1859 as trustee of the lunatic hospital located in Northampton, Massachusetts (Sewall, *Life* 1: 54). Dickinson had a definite opinion about the possibility that the idea of madness was a social construct; Poem 435 gives the evidence of her suspicions of such labels, and perhaps even her secret fears:

Much Madness is divinest Sense--
 To a discerning Eye--
 Much Sense--the starkest Madness--
 'Tis the Majority
 In this, as All, prevail--
 Assent--and you are sane--
 Demur--you're straightway dangerous--
 And handled with a Chain--

In Poem 410, the Dickinson persona attempts to synthesize her battle with mental breakdown, and in the fourth stanza the experience resembles drunkenness:

The first Day's Night had come--
 And grateful that a thing
 So terrible--had been endured--
 I told my Soul to sing--

She said her Strings were snapt--
 Her Bow--to Atoms blown--
 And so to mend her--gave me work
 Until another Morn--

And then--a Day as huge
 As Yesterdays in pairs,
 Unrolled its horror in my face--
 Until it blocked my eyes--

My Brain--began to laugh--
 I mumbled--like a fool--
 And tho' 'tis Years ago--that Day--
 My Brain keeps giggling--still.

And Something's odd--within--
 That person that I was--
 And this One--do not feel the same--
 Could it be Madness--this?

The drunkenness that the speaker's brain experiences seems to be in response to the horror of the experience, perhaps a way to protect herself from the pain. In an attempt to cope, the poet/speaker tells her soul to sing, or more likely, to write poetry. The speaker tries to ward off the pain in another way, too; she says her soul gave her "work." This work serves

the speaker in several senses; as the repair work of mending the snapt strings of the soul, as busy work to keep the female speaker physically productive; and as work of art, the subject matter or experience which the poet can process and record on paper as poetry.

In many of her poems, Dickinson treats the frightening prospect of losing control of one's mind, one's soul, one's self. As in the myth of Dionysus, irrationality lurks behind many heightened emotional experiences. Dickinson explores again and again that state of teetering on the edge of madness. One example is Poem 512:

The Soul has Bandaged moments--
When too appalled to stir--
She feels some ghastly Fright come up
And stop to look at her--

Salute her--with long fingers--
Caress her freezing hair--
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips
The Lover--hovered--o'er--
Unworthy, that a thought so mean
Accost a Theme--so--fair--

The soul has moments of Escape--
When bursting all the doors--
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
And swings upon the Hours,

As do the Bee--delirious borne--
Long Dungeoned from his Rose--
Touch Liberty--then know no more,
But Noon, and Paradise--

The Soul's retaken moments--
When, Felon led along,
With shackles on the plumed feet,
And staples, in the Song,

The Horror welcomes her, again,
These, are not brayed of Tongue--

Here, the soul takes a corpse-like form, and the gruesome scenario of the first two stanzas is a horrific description of the terror that this soul is experiencing. The drinking in the second stanza has a touch of the macabre; it is done by a goblin who sips from the cold lips of the soul. The gothic elements of the poem, such as the goblin caressing the soul's "freezing hair" with its long fingers, plunge us into the horror of the situation.

In the third and fourth stanzas, the soul has times of such freedom and happiness that it can hardly contain the power of emotions. The soul "dances like a Bomb, abroad, / And swings upon the Hours" just as would a bee which has been "Long Dungeoned from his Rose--." This soul, who has "moments of Escape," touches freedom and knows "Paradise."

Restrained, repressed and controlled, the soul is once again a prisoner in the fifth and sixth stanzas. Her song now has staples in it--rivets, in a variant of the poem--and her feet are shackled. If these feet are poetic feet, as Cristanne Miller asserts about other poems (Feet 135), then this poet/speaker's work has been judged and found "uncontrolled," as in Letter 265 to Higginson, the charge to which she responds, "I have no Tribunal."

The poem takes the reader through several stages of response to some horror. First, the soul has "Bandaged moments"; the state is not constant but intermittent, when the soul is in a state of shock, terror and disbelief. Then,

during the "moments of Escape," the soul asserts her power; the female-gendered soul cannot contain her emotions as she experiences freedom. She is about to explode, but these moments quickly revert back to a state of repressiveness as the soul becomes a passive prisoner. During these "retaken moments," she again experiences some unexplained "Horror," a state to which she seems to have resigned herself.

A poem which is deceptively comic is the bacchanalian Poem 230, which disguises a dark depiction of reveling and debauchery in the light and playful terms of two bees carousing together.

We--Bee and I--live by the quaffing--
 'Tisn't all Hock--with us--
 Life has its Ale--
 But it's many a lay of the Dim Burgundy--
 We chant--for cheer--when the Wines--fail--

Do we "get drunk"?
 Ask the jolly Clovers!
 Do we "beat" our "Wife"?
 I--never wed--
 Bee--pledges his--in minute flagons--
 Dainty--as the tress--on her deft Head--

While runs the Rhine--
 He and I--revel--
 First--at the vat--and latest at the Vine--
 Noon--our last Cup--
 "Found dead"--"of Nectar"--
 By a humming Coroner--
 In a By-Thyme! (230)

This poem is intriguing because of the subversive statement, although subtle, that Dickinson makes about the male camaraderie between the speaker and the bee. Their partying quickly turns dangerous when in the second stanza the speaker broaches the subject of drunkenness and abuse. In this poem,

drinking represents male freedom and power. Their lack of restraint allows the drinking and reveling to get out of control, and finally the situation comes to an unexpected end when the speaker and bee are "'Found dead'--'of Nectar.'" Dickinson may use the reveling bees for a sly indictment of the leniency of society's attitude toward male behavior and freedom, as opposed to the strict code for women in her nineteenth-century society.

Even the idea of the drunkard stimulated Dickinson's imagination. Drunkenness of the body is dangerous, she seems to say, but intoxication of the mind is exhilarating. Compare the following late poems which have similar openings, but the ideas implied in each are quite different:

The Ditch is dear to the Drunken man
 For is it not his Bed--
 His Advocate--His Edifice?
 How safe his fallen Head
 In her disheveled Sanctity--
 Above him is the sky--
 Oblivion bending over him
 And Honor leagues away. (1645)

And now consider Poem 1628:

A Drunkard cannot meet a Cork
 Without a Revery--
 And so encountering a Fly
 This January Day
 Jamaicas of Remembrance stir
 That send me reeling in--
 The moderate drinker of Delight
 Does not deserve the spring--
 Of juleps, part are in the Jug
 And more are in the joy--
 Your connoisseur in Liquors
 Consults the Bumble Bee--

The drunkard of Poem 1645 uses intoxication to escape from society for a time. In the temporary safety of the ditch, he is able to remove himself from the provincial concerns of society. But the ditch, Dickinson hints, is not so very different from the grave.

Although the body of the heavy drinker risks tragedy and death, intoxication of the mind must be partaken of wholeheartedly: "The moderate drinker of Delight / Does not deserve the spring--." The speaker of Poem 1628 recounts the surge of happiness she feels at seeing a fly in the dead of winter. Spring, and the world of bumble bees and juleps, must not be far away. Just as the drunkard becomes intoxicated with the bottle, the speaker's imagination experiences something similar to the pleasures of rum ("Jamaicas of Remembrance stir / That send me reeling in--") at the idea of the advent of spring. This "connoisseur in Liquors" refers to mint juleps, a drink made of bourbon, sugar, crushed mint leaves and ice. The joy that this warm-weather drink brings is an intoxication with spring, a time when the Earth seems reborn.

Dickinson's poems on intoxication show its powerful effects on the mind. These poems exhibit a range of emotions, but the poems most crucial to understanding Dickinson's fascination with intoxication imagery are those which demonstrate a movement from one end of the emotional spectrum to the other. For implicit in the liquor image is the

awareness that every intoxicating high has a corresponding low; the ephemeral euphoria of intoxication regrettably has an ensuing down side. In Dickinson's poetry, this low is frequently a sorrow which contrasts a previous state of extreme happiness (296, 430). More significantly, Dickinson writes of the ups and downs associated with intoxication, such as pleasure and pain, happiness and suffering, as having a tenuous opposition, and she explores the precariousness of such oppositions as she contemplates the themes of renunciation and desire.

III

In the anecdote discussed earlier, in which Emily Dickinson offered one of her guests a glass of wine or a rose, there is another factor besides the symbolic nature of her offering which holds special interest for those considering Dickinson's liquor imagery: the guest must choose. For Emily Dickinson, in her poetry as in her life, everything involves a choice, and every choice has a price. The concept of choice was intriguing to her because the choice of one thing over another necessitates the not-having of the other, and it is this state of not-having which held great interest for Dickinson.¹⁷

Dickinson's interest in the idea of choice is closely tied to the basic themes of renunciation and desire.

Renunciation, the denial of pleasures here on Earth in the hope of receiving greater rewards in the afterlife, plays an important role in Christianity, especially as envisioned by the Puritans. Desire, the yearning for satisfaction, contains all the Dionysian elements of both ecstasy and madness. Dickinson's poems on renunciation and desire often take the form of contemplations on hunger and thirst.

Thirst frequently signifies a spiritual longing, as in Poem 726, where the speaker thirsts for "that Great Water in the West-- / Termed Immortality--." In most thirst poems, the wine or liquor, and even water, is imagined as being sweet and satisfying. In Poem 690:

Victory comes late--
And is held low to freezing lips--
Too rapt with frost
To take it--
How sweet it would have tasted--
Just a Drop--

Wine experienced in the rational world, however, is usually dry, as in Poem 728, where she describes her girlhood schooling: "Logarithm--had I--for Drink-- / 'Twas a dry Wine --." Dickinson writes about thirst not only as a desire for a deeper level of spirituality, but also as a way of attaining transcendence. For example, in Poem 313, "'Tis Parching-- vitalizes Wine--."

Many critics have addressed the subject of denial and renunciation in Dickinson's poetry, especially as she presents it in the form of hunger and thirst, but their focus has been

directed more toward food than drink.¹⁸ Thirst is set in opposition to intoxication, but paradoxically it is a prerequisite for intoxication. Moreover, for Dickinson, hunger and thirst have a doubleness. On the one hand, they are tied to the Christian idea that denial and renunciation are virtues which will lead to gain and rewards in the next life. As Dickinson puts it in Poem 745, "Renunciation--is a piercing Virtue-- / The letting go / A Presence--for an Expectation-- / Not now--." This same poem continues, "Renunciation--is the Choosing / Against itself-- / Itself to justify / Unto itself--." So, on the other hand, since the ideas of denial and renunciation imply a struggle or conscious effort to abstain from something pleasurable, they are linked with the state of desire, a condition which replaces the thing denied and which has rewards in and of itself.

Perhaps her Puritan upbringing contributed to her attraction to the state of desire. Just as her society ennobled renunciation, Dickinson again and again puts the state of desire on a higher plane than human experience. The power of the imagination enables desire to be preferable to satisfaction.

As Richard B. Sewall points out in *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, for the "true Puritan," denial and renunciation "had meaning only as they made for the greater glory of God and the salvation of the soul." He explains that the Puritan "lived in constant, fearful awareness of his soul, maintained

continual vigilance, and took his spiritual measurements daily, even hourly" (1: 23). Sewall discusses the work of Perry Miller, who relates that almost every Puritan kept a diary or journal in which he could keep a "strict account of God's dealings with him," so that the "long transaction" could be reviewed at any time, especially at the moment of death. Sewall says that Dickinson's poems were "her way of keeping the long transaction in constant review" (Life 1: 23).

In addition, Sewall finds Perry Miller's description of the "Puritan's inner turmoil" similar to what we find in Dickinson's poems, with their "extraordinary shifts and changes of mood, tone, and even belief." Miller points out that the Puritan "lives inwardly a life of incessant fluctuation, ecstatically elated this day, depressed into despair the next" (Life 1: 23).

Dickinson herself reveals these Puritan preoccupations, however unwittingly. One example of the type of stock-taking described above is the bee who recounts "nectars he has known / And attars that have failed" (1526), and this relates to the mercantile view of life discussed previously. Denial and renunciation may be seen as part of the business transaction of life in which the cost of intoxication is high. It could include loss: loss of innocence, loss of sanity, loss of choice. And in one poem, Poem 125, Dickinson uses the language of economics to describe a cosmic outlook which verifies Miller's observations and perhaps somewhat explains

this "Puritan inner turmoil":

For each extatic instant
We must an anguish pay
In keen and quivering ratio
To the extasy.

For each beloved hour
Sharp pittances of years--
Bitter contested farthings--
And Coffers heaped with Tears! (125)

Dickinson reworks this idea--that an individual must pay a price for each pleasure he or she experiences in life--again and again in the poems, especially in the poems concerning renunciation and gain. Also, in many renunciation poems, Dickinson allows her imagination to tread into territory considered off limits for the body. Physical pleasures are replaced by, and surpassed by, mental pleasures.

One of the best-known commentaries on Dickinson's fascination with the excitement of deprivation is the essay "Sumptuous Destitution," in which Richard Wilbur discusses the possibility that Dickinson may have written some of her poetry in an attempt to cope with a sense of privation. She deals with this sense of privation, according to Wilbur, through her "repeated assertion of the paradox that privation is more plentiful than plenty; that to renounce is to possess the more; that 'The Banquet of abstemiousness / Defaces that of Wine'" (Wilbur 130). The poem to which Wilbur refers here is Poem 1430:

Who never wanted--maddest Joy
Remains to him unknown--
The Banquet of Abstemiousness

Defaces that of Wine--

Within its reach, though yet ungrasped
 Desire's perfect Goal--
 No nearer--lest the Actual--
 Should disenthral thy soul-- (1430)

The poem explores a phenomenon important to Dickinson, in which those who have never had the experience of not-having are unacquainted with the "maddest Joy," the state of desire itself. They do not know the pleasure of imagining what the unknown experience would be like. The poet suggests that the desired thing, when realized, will be a disappointment compared to the wanting of it. The imagining of the experience is preferable to "the Actual" because the mind has the potential to bring more pleasure than the body. Wilbur adds that this "central paradox of her thought" is a "discovery of something about the soul" (130). "Abstemiousness" and renunciation replace intoxication so successfully because they have intoxicating effects of their own.

Furthermore, "Desire's perfect Goal" in the second stanza may be seen as the process of working toward, or writing, the poem. During the process of transforming an idea in the mind to a poem on paper, the poem still holds an element of potential perfection. While "ungrasped," in its unwritten, unarticulated state, the poem in the mind enthralls the soul. The actual poem when written, however, will always be less perfect than the poet hoped, for the process of distilling and ordering the exhilaration and chaos of the intoxicated mind

also limits and reduces it. For the poet, the "Actual" is disappointing.

With hunger and thirst often come better comprehension or realization. Poem 579 addresses one of Dickinson's primary concerns in the renunciation poems, one which critic Richard Wilbur describes thus: "...once an object has been magnified by desire, it cannot be wholly possessed by appetite" (131).

I had been hungry, all the Years--
My Noon had Come--to dine--
I trembling drew the Table near--
And touched the Curious Wine--

'Twas this on Tables I had seen--
When turning, hungry, Home
I looked in Windows, for the Wealth
I could not hope--for Mine--

I did not know the ample Bread--
'Twas so unlike the Crumb
The Birds, and I, had often shared
In Nature's--Dining Room--

The Plenty hurt me-- 'twas so new--
Myself felt ill--and odd--
As Berry--of a Mountain Bush--
Transplanted--to the Road--

Nor was I hungry--so I found
That Hunger--was a way
Of Persons outside Windows--
The Entering--takes away-- (579)

The speaker addresses the themes of hunger and thirst from the perspective of one who has been denied such "Plenty." As in Poem 230, where "Noon" represents the "last Cup" a bee drinks before he dies of excessive consumption of nectar, here noon is again a moment of transformation; it is the long-awaited moment when the speaker's desires may be realized. She is

used to this state of not-having and only knew such wealth through the voyeuristic act of looking through the windows of those who have. As with Poem 383 which begins "Exhilaration --is within--," the speaker has been able to elevate her situation by making her state of not-having a choice. Perhaps the "Wealth" here is poetic recognition and fame, which is a wealth she has decided she'd rather live without. In this poem, the imagery of the meal laid out on the table, with bread and wine, touches on the religious and domestic spheres, the places where society assumes a woman should be gaining personal satisfaction.

The language of Poem 579 also focuses on the material inequities of those who have and those who have not. Emily Dickinson identifies with those who do not have, and do not expect to have, a "Wealth / I could not hope--for Mine--." Even more revealing is a variant of this line which reads: "I looked in Windows, for the Things / I could not hope--to earn--." The phrase "for Mine" implies ownership, the having of the desired thing; the phrase "to earn," however, not only points to her economic isolation, her state of being unalterably removed from the mercantile world around her, but it also implies the deserving of something, such as the earning of respect and recognition as a poet. This ambivalence about her worthiness as a poet develops into self-assurance and personal choice by the end of the poem. Just a touch of the extraordinary wine, presumably poetic

recognition, seems to be satisfying enough for the speaker. When she has the opportunity to partake of the "ample Bread," she finds that the plenty hurts and makes her feel strange and uncomfortable. However, the autonomy she has attained, her ability to make her own choice about her life and work, causes her to realize that she is no longer hungry. The power of choice is satisfaction enough.¹⁹

To gain insight into the way Dickinson attributes superior qualities to the state of not-having, the best poem to consider is one of her most famous poems, Poem 67, in which she proposes that "Success is counted sweetest / By those who ne'er succeed. / To comprehend a nectar / Requires sorest need." The experience of not-having enables the mind to be more receptive to what Emerson calls the "sublime vision." Dickinson suggests that the experience of not-having sharpens the senses, and only then can one truly "comprehend a nectar." She also asserts that the ability to appreciate the sweetness of success and to truly understand the good in life is a matter of perception, a perception which can only come from not-having.

Dickinson uses food and drink imagery as a means to touch on the provoking themes of denial and desire, abstinence and indulgence, suffering and ecstasy. Indeed, in Dickinson's poetry, renunciation and intoxication often have a symbiotic relationship. She says in Poem 872:

I, of a finer Famine
Deem my Supper dry

For but a Berry of Domingo
And a Torrid Eye. (872)

Clearly, in the poet's mind, self-denial and passion go hand in hand.

Just as Dickinson is able to take the Christian virtue of renunciation and subvert it into an enriching experience which brings a new form of intoxication, she explores wine's Christian significance well beyond its association with self-sacrifice. The sacramental importance of wine, along with the pagan resonances found in many of Dickinson's Christian references to wine, is at the core of the tight symbolic web she crafted around wine imagery.

IV

In her poetry, Dickinson made full use of the rich religious significance of wine in Christianity. The drinking of wine as Christ's blood in the celebration of the Eucharist, along with the eating of bread as Christ's body, promises those who partake of it a deep connection to Christ's suffering, death and resurrection, and to the hope of everlasting life. It is in this symbolic link with suffering and sacrifice that Dickinson is able to reconcile wine's Christian and pagan elements. In playing off wine's Christian ties to renunciation and gain with its Dionysian link with desire, and then playing on the ultimate cohesion of the imagery, Dickinson preempts wine's Christian symbolic meaning,

molding it for her own use in the poems. The poems often point to the range of religious or transcendent experience which surrounds the symbol of wine.

In Poem 1452, Dickinson invokes communion wine, relating it to moments of poetic insight:

Your thoughts don't have words every day
 They come a single time
 Like signal esoteric sips
 Of the communion Wine
 Which while you taste so native seems
 So easy so to be
 You cannot comprehend its price
 Nor its infrequency

Once again, Dickinson asserts that those who sip the wine of the imagination "cannot comprehend its price" and cannot know its worth.

Dickinson frequently associates wine and other metaphorical drinks with ecstasy, although sometimes it is a tragic ecstasy as in Poem 296, "One Year ago--jots what?" in which the speaker reflects on her first and only meeting with her beloved. In recalling that day one year before, she compares the joy and fulfillment of love to wine. The third stanza begins, "I tasted--careless--then-- / I did not know the Wine / Came once a World--Did you?" The speaker hopes to rekindle this love "in Eternity" where the two will partake "In doubtful meal." Although this wine obviously represents happiness and love, the poem conveys a feeling of suffering even in the description of joy with its evocation of Christ's words in the garden of Gethsemane, "O my Father, if it be

possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt," and then, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matthew 26:39,42). The reader may also recall another verse from Matthew, the gospel which Dickinson quoted most frequently (Capps 30), "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29). So joy and sorrow, happiness and suffering, are inherent in the use of wine imagery here. In Poem 296, the tormented speaker cannot separate the happy memory from her present sadness:

One Year ago--jots what?
 God--spell the word! I--can't--
 Was't Grace? Not that--
 Was't Glory? That--will do--
 Spell slower--Glory--

Such Anniversary shall be--
 Sometimes--not often--in Eternity--
 When farther Parted, than the Common Woe--
 Look--feed upon each other's faces--so--
 In doubtful meal, if it be possible
 Their Banquet's true--

I tasted--careless--then--
 I did not know the Wine
 Came once a World--Did you?
 Oh, had you told me so--
 This Thirst would blister--easier--now--
 You said it hurt you--most--
 Mine--was an Acorn's Breast--
 And could not know how fondness grew
 In Shaggier Vest--
 Perhaps--I couldn't--
 But, had you looked in--
 A Giant--eye to eye with you, had been--
 No Acorn--then--

So--Twelve months ago--

We breathed--
 Then dropped the Air--
 Which bore it best?
 Was this--the patientest--
 Because it was a Child, you know--
 And could not value--Air?

If to be "Elder"--means most pain--
 I'm old enough today, I'm certain--then--
 As old as thee--how soon?
 One--Birthday more--or Ten?
 Let me--choose!
 Ah, Sir, None! (296)

The second half of this poem discusses the speaker's sense of how she has matured during the past year because of this experience. Her loss of "the Wine" of love has brought on "This Thirst," an ongoing and unquenchable longing that has given her a new sense of maturity after the emotional heartache she has had to endure. This experience has made her "old enough, today, I'm certain--then-- / As old as thee," making them more experientially equal in love and loss because of the hurt she was not acquainted with a year ago. To her question, "Which bore it best?" the answer seems to be the speaker. She has gained experience through suffering and has become empowered to choose because of it.

Another poem in which a metaphorical drink represents some kind of lost ecstatic or romantic experience is Poem 1720, in which Dickinson again explores the ideas expressed in the third stanza of the above poem:

Had I known that the first was the last
 I should have kept it longer.
 Had I known that the last was the first
 I should have drunk it stronger.
 Cup, it was your fault,
 Lip was not the liar.

No, lip, it was yours,
Bliss was most to blame. (1720)

As happens so often in Dickinson's wine and flower poems, the flesh is weak when confronted with the power of wine or nectar. The "Bliss" of intoxication is almost irresistible. It has a seductive quality.

The metaphor of intoxication has political overtones in Dickinson's poetry. The irony of her repressive society's attitude toward alcohol consumption would not have been lost on Dickinson, living as she did in a religious culture where the Christian sacrament had monumental importance, but where a growing temperance movement encouraged good Puritans to shun intoxicating beverages. In fact, since her father Edward Dickinson, a prominent lawyer and politician, worked for the temperance movement in Amherst (Leyda 1: 25), his daughter's employment of liquor imagery and references to herself as "Your connoisseur in Liquors" and "Debauchee of Dew" who lives "by the quaffing" imply an ongoing protest and rebellion (1628, 214, 230). As Albert Gelpi so aptly points out, "It was a reeling triumph to be a secret drinker while in the name of orthodox religion her father labored tirelessly for the Temperance League. He could close the bars of Amherst, but not the 'inns of Molten Blue' where she drank with saints and was served by angels" (Mind 134). Furthermore, the religious resonances of wine imagery factor into Dickinson's use of this imagery to discuss her art. As Charles R. Anderson has observed, "The profusion of rums, juleps, and other symbols of

inebriation in her poems is even more striking by reason of their being incorporated within strict hymn meters, which preserve some flavor of the village piety against which their meaning is set in ironic tension" (Conscious 37). Anderson continues, "The boast . . . that she has drunk freely from the jug is her shock tactic for expressing the need to break with orthodoxy, not only the forms of behavior and thought but the conventions of contemporary poetry, if she were to achieve vitality" (37-38).

Indeed, she breaks with orthodoxy again and again, as in her description of the "Sacrament" in one of her most well-known works, Poem 130, a poem about Indian summer. Although the speaker expresses some doubt about the genuineness of the unnatural summer, she decides to take the risk of joining all of nature in this "Sacrament of summer days":

These are the days when Birds come back--
A very few--a Bird or two--
To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies resume
The old--old sophistries of June--
A blue and gold mistake.

Oh fraud that cannot cheat the Bee--
Almost thy plausibility
Induces my belief.

Till ranks of seeds their witness bear--
And softly thro' the altered air
Hurries a timid leaf.

Oh Sacrament of summer days,
Oh Last Communion in the Haze--
Permit a child to join.

Thy sacred emblems to partake--
Thy consecrated bread to take

And thine immortal wine! (130)

This transforming experience of Indian summer is like "immortal wine," for it has a redemptive quality; it connects those who experience it to a new life, not only after death, but also in the natural cycle of life here on Earth. The speaker of the poem confronts the spirituality of nature in this poem about the imagination. She is drawn to nature's power, and so she goes along with the "fraud," rationalizing that "Almost thy plausibility / Induces my belief." Even though the speaker realizes that the bee is not fooled, she imagines the possibility that this dreamlike occurrence is true. She has faith. For those who want to believe, the sacramental bread and wine offer similar enticements.

By using the language of Holy Communion to describe a communion with nature, Dickinson subverts the common notion of the "Sacrament" and draws on the transcendental idea of the sacred relationship between man and nature. The speaker here calls herself a "child," and by using this guise of innocence she undermines the authority of her strict, male-dominated church by putting the power of the sacrament into her own hands on her own terms.

Dickinson alludes to the wine of the sacrament in numerous other poems. The Christian associations of wine, liquor and nectar in Dickinson's poetry, however, are complicated and somewhat undercut by these same symbols' Dionysian meanings of ecstasy and exhilaration. Nectar often

figures as a means by which worth is measured or by which an unsuspecting bee is lured to consume in excess.

Come slowly--Eden!
Lips unused to Thee--
Bashful--sip thy Jessamines--
As the fainting Bee--

Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums--
Counts his nectars--
Enters--and is lost in Balms. (211)

In this poem, the speaker's longing for, and implied fearfulness of, an impending Eden-like experience is compared to a bee approaching "his flower" and being totally overcome by the nectar. As the poem opens, the "Bashful" speaker is like a bee just about to "sip" a jasmine flower. The speaker intimates some ambivalence about the seduction, unlike the bee of the second stanza who thinks himself in control of the situation when he reaches "his" flower. The bee even takes the time to count his nectars before he enters. The roles of the seducer and the one seduced become blurred in the second stanza, however, as the previously passive flower overwhelms the bee. Of course, we are left to assume that the prospect of a similar loss of control is feared by the speaker in the analogous encounter. As is often the case with Dickinson's intoxication metaphor, one of the dangers of intoxication is the possibility of crossing the border into irrationality. And as in other poems involving bee-flower seductions, Dickinson questions the applicability of prescribed roles. As Gelpi notes, "Emily Dickinson could think of herself as the

flower or the bee, as the poet possessed or the poet possessing" (Mind 139).

The speaker of the poem calls this ecstasy she is anticipating "Eden," comparing it to an other-worldly experience. Eden, however, implies only a temporary pleasure. Jack L. Capps remarks that it implies the "supernatural bliss of the prelapsarian existence," in which "impending expulsion intensifies the joy" (31). Interestingly, the loss of this state of innocence also sets the scene where man and woman were first introduced to a number of burdens: labor in general and the division of labor for the sexes; suffering, especially the suffering of women in labor and the pain of production/reproduction; and death.

The systems of religious language, however, do not preclude the possibility for religious experience to be reconciled with ecstasy. The language of the poem, with its archaic pronouns and sensual metaphors, recalls the Song of Solomon, which describes a love relationship in joyous, passionate terms. The chapter begins,

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.

Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.

Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee. (Song 1.2-4)

The passage continues,

How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse!

how much better is thy love than wine! and the
smell of thine ointments than all spices!

Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb:
honey and milk are under thy tongue. . . . (Song
4.10-11)

Later in the passage, the lover's lips are said to be "like
lilies" (Song 5.13), and the vineyard sets an Eden-like scene
for the two lovers:²⁰

Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if
the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and
the pomegranates bud forth; there will I give thee my
loves. (Song 7.12)

The similarities between the poem and Song are
undeniable, especially when one considers the various meanings
of the poem's ultimate word, "Balms." According to the Oxford
English Dictionary, the word "balm" has a number of meanings,
including a fragrant oil or ointment used for anointing, or
more figuratively, an aromatic fragrance or agreeable perfume,
both of which tie in strongly with Song.

The various meanings of the word "Balms" contribute to
diverse readings of the last line, and each alters the reading
of the entire poem. For instance, "balm" may be an aromatic
resinous product from plants much prized for its fragrance and
medicinal properties, and it is in this sense that Dickinson
uses the word literally in the poem. Most literally, the
phrase "lost in Balms" describes the bee, enveloped by the
flower, becoming overwhelmed as he partakes of the balm and
nectar of the flower. In the sense that balm can mean
fragrance, the phrase takes on a sensual, erotic meaning, as

in being immersed in the smell of a lover; the poem as a whole then describes an Eden which is a passionate, romantic experience.

Some of the other meanings of "balm" infuse the poem with additional levels of meaning. For instance, it may mean an aromatic ointment used for soothing pain or healing wounds, or more figuratively, a healing, soothing, or softly restorative agency or influence. If the word takes on this meaning of something that heals or soothes, the poem works on a spiritual level, with the Eden representing a religious or artistic realization. Finally, "balm" may mean an aromatic preparation for embalming the dead. If it is used here as an embalming ointment, then Eden is the Heaven to which the soul longingly journeys after departing from the body. In any case, the poem describes an embracing of ecstasy and joy.

We may view the speaker's imploring opening, "Come slowly-- Eden!" as a request to stave off experience, to delay the arrival of this Eden because she is afraid or overwhelmed, or perhaps because she is confused about entering a new realm of experience. However, she may want her "Eden," if it is a state of exhilaration, to come on slowly so that she can savor every moment of its anticipation and fulfillment. Just as the bee becomes "lost in Balms," so may the speaker lose herself in this experience; therefore she wants this joy to come slowly so that she may fully appreciate it. She may desire to relish the experience because she knows it is fleeting. But,

in embracing Eden, the speaker must accept all that the loss of Eden entails, including suffering, death and labor. At the prospect of losing her innocence or having her state of desire transformed into experience, the speaker becomes reluctant to trade the state of desire for a state of knowledge.

In the end, the many poems which fuse Christian associations of wine with pagan ones are significant not only in showing the ties each has with a cycle of suffering, death and resurrection, but also because they point to what may have been the single most appealing aspect of the wine image for Emily Dickinson, and that is its association with immortality. Because of wine's redemptive properties, whether in its association with life after death in the Christian tradition or in the fertility and rebirth celebrated in the Dionysian myth, Dickinson implies that wine has transforming powers. Through their interplay of crucial themes, the wine poems seem to reconcile the personal sacrifice, and perhaps even the suffering, Dickinson required of herself to satisfy her vision of the vocation of poet.

For whatever reason or combination of reasons Emily Dickinson did not publish, choosing instead to keep her poetry to herself except for the fraction sent to friends and relatives, she nonetheless arranged about half her poems, binding them with string into booklets or fascicles. Like the "Essential Oils" of Poem 675, she kept her "Attar," her poetry, in "Lady's Drawer" to do its work after her death. By

her ultimate refusal to publish her nearly eighteen-hundred poems, she managed to secure a place for her art outside the economic realm. By rejecting the desire to sell her work, she has ultimately maintained the purity of her art. Indeed, for Emily Dickinson, "Exhilaration--is within--," for she had an "internal bar" (383, 1753). Dickinson believed, as Emerson asserts in "The Poet," that "The poorest experience is rich enough for all the purposes of expressing thought," and she succeeded in demonstrating the richness of everyday things and activities. And she chose her work as she chose her life, private and satisfied with the self. Despite the fact that in her nineteenth-century New England culture, a serious woman poet had no real possibility for recognition and understanding, she chose to write poetry, and she hoped that the ages would honor her life's work and judge her by her poetic merits. Her request rings out in the ears of her readers today:

So measure Wine--
 Naked of Flask--Naked of Cask--
 Bare Rhine--
 Which Ruby's mine? (583)

Notes

1 The poems and letters quoted in this paper will be referred to by the numbers assigned by Thomas H. Johnson in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson and Selected Letters*.

2 Dickinson wrote most of her liquor poems between 1859 and 1864, years which comprised her most prolific period and which also were a time of personal crisis. Her references to drinking include wine, liquor, Rhine wine, nectar, vineyards, hock, draughts, juleps, dew, balms, ale, alcohol, rum, sherry, bourbon and burgundy. She also refers to vats, flasks, tuns, tankards, casks, flagons, drops, drams, jugs, cups, and dregs; and she uses verbs like distil, brew, sip, drink, quaff, intoxicate, inebriate.

She even writes about places where liquor is important, such as "Vevay" and "Manzanilla" (138, 206, 214). Critics have not fully appreciated the relevance of these references in the context of Dickinson's liquor imagery. Editor Thomas Wentworth Higginson did not understand her references to Vevay (Poems 1: 146), but her association of bees with Vevay seems to suggest the Vevey Festival, considered the world's most important wine festival, which has been taking place since the seventeenth century in the town of Vevey, Switzerland, as a development of the activities of the medieval Wine-Growers Guild (Lichine 591). In terms of the reference to "Manzanilla" in the last line of the poem "I taste a liquor never brewed--," Dickinson scholar Thomas H. Johnson glosses it as Dickinson's association of "Manzanillo, an important commercial city on the southern coast of Cuba, with the export of rum" (Poems 1: 149-50). She probably was aware, too, of the meaning of the word she actually wrote, "Manzanilla," which is a kind of dry and light Spanish sherry with a somewhat bitter flavor. In any case, her use of these detailed terms proves that she consciously incorporated a broad network of liquor images in the poetry.

3 For additional poems which contain liquor or drinking imagery, but which are not discussed in this paper, see Poems 16, 119, 123, 128, 132, 134, 136, 169, 207, 319, 473, 525, 527, 557, 673, 784, 1001, 1226, 1642, 1772.

4 For example, critics such as Albert Gelpi in *Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet* and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* have described Emily Dickinson's action here as being curious. Gelpi, in describing the poet's "eccentricities," cites the case of "her offering a guest the odd choice of a glass of wine or a rose" (167). Gilbert and Gubar recognize that many poems suggest that "Neither sentimentality nor madness . . . motivated Dickinson to introduce herself to Higginson by handing him 'two day lilies' and, upon occasion, to offer guests 'the unlikely

choice of a glass of wine or a rose.' Guarded, disguised, fictionalizing herself, she nevertheless must have been trying symbolically to convey one bare truth about her private religion" (647). Unfortunately, Gilbert and Gubar do not provide a reference for their quote about the "unlikely choice."

5 This idea of turning ordinary experience into extraordinary poetry perhaps was influenced by Emerson's essay, "The Poet," in which he writes, "The poorest experience is rich enough for all the purposes of expressing thought. Why covet a knowledge of new facts?"

The section of "The Poet" which follows is pertinent to a discussion of wine imagery in Dickinson's poetry because it addresses the process of symbol-making that Dickinson must have used to transform an ordinary and often-used image like wine into an elaborate symbol system. And for Dickinson, wine-making and symbol-making are one. The following part of the essay was marked in the Dickinson family's copy of *Essays: Second Series*, according to critic Jack L. Capps (115-16).

Day and night, house and garden, a few books, a few actions, serve us as well as would all trades and all spectacles. We are far from having exhausted the significance of the few symbols we use. We can come to use them yet with a terrible simplicity. It does not need that a poem should be long. Every word was once a poem. Every new relation is a new word (327).

Emerson continues:

We are symbols and inhabit symbols; workmen, work, and tools, words and things, birth and death, all are emblems; but we sympathize with the symbols, and being infatuated with the economical use of things, we do not know that they are thoughts. The poet, by an ulterior intellectual perception, gives them a power which makes their old use forgotten, and puts eyes and a tongue into every dumb and inanimate object. He perceives the independence of the thought on the symbol, the stability of the thought, the accidentality and fugacity of the symbol (328-29).

6 Dickinson's use of liquor imagery is further feminized, albeit unconsciously, through the frequent inclusion of womblike symbols such as jugs, vats, cups, flasks, tuns, tankards, casks, flagons, vases and so on. These womblike symbols hold the source of a passionate intoxication which cannot be contained and the likeness of which cannot be reproduced: "Not all the Vats upon the Rhine / Yield such an

Alcohol!" (v. 214). For more on the sexual implications of symbols such as cups and the like, see J.E. Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols*.

7 For more on Dickinson and women's domestic sphere, see Vivian Pollak's essay, "Thirst and Starvation in Dickinson's Poetry," in which she observes, "Throughout the nineteenth century, the compensatory ethic of 'woman's sphere' incorporated the tensions of self-sacrifice and self-affirmation . . . The imagery of eating and drinking is especially appropriate to this theme, drawn as it is from woman's sphere" (105). In addition, see Cristanne Miller's *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar*, especially a section headed "Feminine Diction and Syntax" (pages 106-12), where Miller considers some of the "substantial number of Dickinson's analogies" which "draw on typically feminine activities" (108). Richard Sewall discusses attitudes toward and participation in the family's housekeeping duties (*Life* 1: 86-88). In addition, for an interesting discussion on Dickinson's use of spinning and sewing metaphors, see Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (633-42).

8 The Dickinson family's copy of this February 1859 issue may be found in Houghton Library at Harvard University. The Dickinsons began purchasing the *Atlantic Monthly* beginning with the first issue in November 1857 (Capps 148, 132).

9 Consider, for example, the language used by William Dean Howells in the following comment about Emily Dickinson. It appeared in an 1891 article in *Harper's Magazine* entitled, "Poems by Emily Dickinson":

If nothing else had come out of our life but this strange poetry, we should feel that in the work of Emily Dickinson, America, or New England rather, had made a distinctive addition to the literature of the world, and could not be left out of any record of it. This poetry is as characteristic of our life as our business enterprise, our political turmoil, our demagogism or our millionaires (Wells 1).

10 According to *Compton's Encyclopedia*, it was once believed that the camel stored water in its hump or in one of the several parts of its stomach. However, in 1954 a research team discovered that the camel actually conserves water by holding it in tissues and cells. Dickinson implies in Poem 711 that the water stored in the camel's hump is like wine stored in a jug or ideas in a "Hermetic Mind." Also, the camel can live without water far longer than other mammals. It can travel without water for a week during the summer and for more than two weeks during the winter.

11 In addition, she uses the flower as an undisguised symbol of female sexuality, the most obvious examples being the rendezvous described in the playful Poem 213, "Did the Harebell loose her girdle," or the enraptured but humble rose of Poem 1339, "A Bee his burnished Carriage." Besides its frequent role as seducer of the bee, for Dickinson the rose has other characteristics that show its other side, such as its possession of thorns and its certain and inevitable decay (19, L 189). And as Dickinson has reminded us, the rose can be preserved as attar, but it is "the gift of screws" (675).

12 The Dickinsons' copy of Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable* now in the Houghton Library of Harvard University contains an autograph signature, "Edward Dickinson 1856," according to Dr. Thomas Amos, Head of Public Services, Houghton Library. This shows that Emily Dickinson's father purchased the book the year following its publication. Emily Dickinson's frequent allusions in the poems to classical mythology show her interest in and knowledge of this literature. Some examples are references to the Muses (1), Jupiter and Lethe (1730), Jason and the Golden Fleece (870, 1466), Amphitrite (284), Midas (1466, 1548), Elysium (1760), and Atropos (L 120). In Poem 1545, she refers to Orpheus, who interestingly enough, was reportedly torn apart by maenads.

13 Dickinson must have been familiar with Emerson's poem, for in 1850, when she was nineteen, she mentioned a gift of "Ralph Emerson's Poems--a beautiful copy" from her friend Ben Newton (L 30 qtd. in Patterson 181).

14 In a number of poems, Dickinson suggests some of the possible dangers in being a creative woman, such as in Poem 199 ("I'm 'wife'--I've finished that--"), where her speaker documents the personal struggle involved in being a proper, silenced, Victorian woman. In Poem 441 ("This is my letter to the World"), the speaker asks for understanding when she implores, "Sweet--countrymen-- / Judge tenderly--of Me." In Poem 1737 (Rearrange a 'Wife's' affection!), the Dickinson persona confides, "None suspect me of the crown," and "Big my Secret but it's bandaged--," implying she feels it necessary to hide from society that which could cause society to misjudge her. She refers to experiencing madness in a number of poems, including Poem 937 ("I felt a Cleaving in my Mind --"), Poem 957 ("As One does Sickness over"), where she refers to a "convalescent Mind," and in Poem 528 ("Mine--by the Right of the White Election!"), where the speaker talks of "Delirious Charter!" Finally, in Poem 1323 ("I never hear that one is dead"), the Dickinson persona confesses, "Had Madness, had it once or twice / The yawning Consciousness, / Beliefs are Bandaged." Dickinson's poems make it clear that she was always aware of the judgments of society as well as her own perceptions.

15 Charlotte Nekola, in looking at Dickinson's relation to nineteenth-century ideas of womanhood, points out that "Dickinson would have learned that fame and publication were inappropriate, even devastating, for the woman writer; that the American continent, its marketplaces, ports, rivers, and plains were not the 'true' text of womanhood or her poetry; that writing about the self, for a woman, was an indication not of integrity but of "selfishness" or even madness; that writing poetry, with the writerly ego and authority traditionally required, conflicted with definitions of her gender" (153).

16 In her own region of Massachusetts, Dickinson was probably aware of at least one occasion where a woman was threatened with hospitalization in a mental institution for having the audacity to stand up to an abusive husband and sue for divorce. The husband, the Rev. John Eastman of nearby Hawley, was Edward Dickinson's client in 1853. The unfortunate woman had charged that her husband, according to the newspaper account, had "treated his wife with coldness and harshness, and on several occasions with violence, that he abused and neglected her in sickness, intercepted her letters and restrained her liberty, and that last December he carried her to the Brattleboro Hospital on a pretence of insanity." The case was decided in favor of Edward Dickinson's client (Shurr 37).

17 Joan Burbick notes:

The activity of not-having can, however, gain such importance that it begins to rival consumption. Each denial builds the prize to such proportions that actual possession pales in relation to the struggle to acquire. Consummation is denied, and instead asceticism emerges as a means to defer and increase the value of what becomes an impossible goal.

.....
 Restraint, a form of self-control or self-robbery, that regulates the desire to consume can as easily become a form of deprivation. (181-82).

Burbick's observations reinforce those of Richard Wilbur, whose discussion of Dickinson and deprivation and renunciation will be considered later in this paper.

18 One article which highlights Dickinson's drinking imagery, however, is "Some Aspects of Emily Dickinson's Food and Liquor Poems," in which David Luisi notes that "Since sustenance is necessary for physical existence and since its circumscription can result in a greater compensatory good, food and liquor imagery is appropriate in expressing the

necessity of experience for poetic life and the 'sumptuous destitution' which results from curtailing certain experiences." Luisi concludes that "food and liquor imagery render an elemental quality to her verse. Had she used esoteric imagery in conjunction with her fine shadings of emotion and subtlety of consciousness, she would be guilty of being a private poet. However, as the intensity of emotion drives her to the very tip of her consciousness, the forceful familiarity of the prototypal images of eating and drinking helps carry the reader along with her" (40).

Besides the well-known article by Richard Wilbur entitled "Sumptuous Destitution," other works of criticism which examine Dickinson's use of denial and renunciation include Vivian Pollak's "Thirst and Starvation in Dickinson's Poetry," Heather Kirk Thomas' "Emily Dickinson's 'Renunciation' and Anorexia Nervosa," Joan Burbick's "Emily Dickinson and the Economics of Desire," and Robert Weisbuch's *Emily Dickinson's Poetry*, especially Chapter 8 on "The Necessary Veil: A Quest Fiction."

19 I disagree with Vivian Pollak's assertion that this poem "records the death of the social self" (113). Instead, I see it as a testament to the emergence of a new poetic self. The speaker here clearly had been socially alienated and frustrated, as is recorded in the opening of the poem, but a change of attitude and appetite takes place before the final stanza.

20 Rebecca Patterson calls the Song of Solomon "the most plausible source" of Dickinson's symbolic vineyards, such as the "'Vineyards' she longs to reach" in Letter 222 and "her 'palpitating Vineyard'" in Poem 175. She also notes that Dickinson "apparently knew the Song of Solomon by heart" (151-52).

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VITA

Deborah Ann Yard

Born in Trenton, New Jersey, April 30, 1962. Graduated from Lawrence High School in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, June 1980; A.B., Albright College, 1984. In August 1987, she entered the College of William and Mary as a graduate student in the Department of English and the following semester became a research assistant in that department.